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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 005070

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SUBJECT: SHIA LEADERS REACT TO ELECTIONS

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Sayed Kareem al Bukhati from List 652 Sun of Iraq and Jawad al Bolani of Ahmed Chalabi's List 569 Iraqi National Congress told us December 18 that the elections were conducted well in most places. Bukhati felt there was some electoral fraud, but his party has yet to file any complaints with the IECI. His party will do well in Sadr City and southern Iraq, he asserted, and should get five seats in the next parliament. Bolani was hopeful of scoring over a dozen seats in the next assembly. He expressed concern that the Shia clerical establishment (Marjaiya) name was invoked to sway voters, despite Grand Ayatollah Sistani's refusal to endorse any list explicitly. Bolani said his party has filed a complaint with the IECI, alleging fraud in Kirkuk and elsewhere. It appears that neither of these election slates won a seat among the 230 awarded at the provincial level, based on the preliminary figures announced December 19-20. It is possible that their upbeat assessments now will darken and parties like theirs will complain more vociferously about fraud. END SUMMARY.

Bolani the Confident

2. (C) Jawad al Bolani told Pol/FSN he was pleased the elections went as smoothly and as peacefully as they did. He said List 569 was popular in such places in the Shia heartland as Basrah, Hillah, and Kut. He also feels they received many votes in Ramadi and Baghdad. Bolani said he expects his party to get between 17 and 25 seats in the next parliament. (Comment: As best we can tell, List 659 received no seats among the 230 seats awarded at the provincial level. End Comment.)

3. (C) Bolani said that his party filed complaints with the IECI, alleging fraud in Kirkuk and elsewhere. He said most of the fraud occurred in places that have mixed Shia-Sunni Arab populations, such as At Tamim and Salah ad Din provinces. He also said that he does not think the IECI will be able to deal with all of the problems reported to it, but he hopes the IECI will learn from these elections so the next ones will be cleaner.

4. (C) Bolani also expressed concerns that "some people" (presumably UIC List 555) implied throughout the campaign that the Marjaiya endorsed them, despite the fact that Grand Ayatollah Sistani never explicitly endorsed any electoral list.

Bukhati the Hopeful

5. (C) Bukhati told Pol/FSN he was pleased that the elections were peaceful and that Iraqis of all sects and ethnicities took part in large numbers. He opined that List 652 received most of its votes from the Sadr City and southern Iraq. The Sun of Iraq list had several tribal sheikhs on its candidate list, so much of the party's support came from other tribal sheikhs, he asserted. Bukhati predicted that Sun of Iraq will get five seats in the next parliament, and will join a coalition with other parties. (Comment: it appears that List 652 did not win any seats among the 230 awarded at the provincial level, based on the preliminary results announced December 19-20. End Comment.)

7. (C) Bukhati did say that there was much fraud in Baghdad and other provinces. List 652 has not yet filed any complaints with the IECI, but may later.

8. (C) COMMENT: Bukhati is a long-time Embassy contact who at times has aligned himself with the Sadr Bureau in Sadr City. Despite allegations of fraud from Bolani and Bukhati, their were (surprisingly perhaps) positive about the election process. These conversations occurred before the announcement of preliminary results, and their mood may have darkened.

KHALILZAD